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ABSTRACT

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act mandates that state education agencies develop and implement an assessment system that allows for disaggregation of results at state, district, and school levels by gender, race, English proficiency, and migrant status. Schools receiving Title I funds must demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" in student progress. The purpose of this report is to examine data trends in Minnesota's Basics Standards Tests (BSTs), statewide tests of reading and math, for the years 1996-1999 for limited-English- proficient (LEP) students. Several observations are made, including the following: participation for LEP students in the Minnesota BSTs remains high; performance of LEP students remains low, with a persistent though narrowing achievement gap of 20-25% between LEP and non-LEP students; greater gains in mean percentages of items correct are being made by LEP students taking reading texts than math tests, which suggests English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teachers may be successful in teaching the reading skills needed on the BST; and, finally, the relative number of Minnesota LEP students taking advantage of test accommodations (i.e. extended testing times, translation of directions, special test settings, etc.) is low. Appendix A, data on "Accommodations and Translations Available to LEP Students on the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests of Math and Reading 1999," eight tables, four figures, and nine references are included. (KFT)

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STATE ASSESSMENT SERIES
Minnesota Report 30

ED 447 718

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1999 Report on the Participation and Performance of Limited English Proficient Students on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests

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STATE ASSESSMENT SERIES
Minnesota Report 30

1999 Report on the Participation and Performance of Limited English Proficient Students on Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests

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The Minnesota Assessment Project is a four-year, federally funded effort awarded to the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The project's goal is to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards. Specifically, the project will examine ways in which students with limited English and students with disabilities can participate in the Basic Standards Exams of reading, mathematics and written composition and in the performance-based assessments of the high standards in the Profile of Learning.

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Overview

Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act specifies that all states must disaggregate statewide test data for limited English proficient (LEP) students. However, to date, most states have not provided sufficient test data to make judgments about the academic progress of LEP students (Lachat, 1999), particularly those who are getting English as a Second Language or Bilingual Education services. Providing such data would:

- Ensure that groups of education stakeholders have a common vision for what education reform, especially large-scale assessment, can accomplish and develop a unified way of supporting reform efforts (Lachat, 1999).
- Support the inclusion of English Language Learners (ELLs) in high standards instead of tracking these students into lower-level courses that are not aligned with standards (Rothman & Elmore, 1999)
- Allow educators and policymakers to determine the factors that are related to significant achievement differences between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers. Programmatic changes could then be made to address these differences (Kopriva, 2000)
- Make certain that decisions made with large-scale assessment data represent all students (Kopriva, 2000)

The purpose of this report is to examine data trends in Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests, statewide tests of reading and math, for the years 1996-99 for students with limited English proficiency. Data from the writing test are not included in this report since this test was implemented much more recently and because writing tests are administered at a different grade level.

Background on the Basic Standards Tests

Minnesota's Basic Standards Tests (BSTs) in reading and math were administered statewide for the first time in 1996. At that time, districts could choose whether to participate. In 1997, participation in some type of large-scale testing was mandatory, but districts could choose whether to use the BSTs or some other type of standardized test. The test of Written Composition was administered for the first time in 1999 for students in 10th grade. Test results are used for school accountability purposes, but are also used for high stakes decisions that affect individual students. All state public high school students entering 9th grade in 1997 or later must pass these tests to

receive a diploma, with some exceptions for students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and students with disabilities.

Those in the class of 2000 need 70% of the test items correct in order to pass the test and receive a diploma. Students in the class of 2001 and subsequent classes need 75% of the items correct. However, local public districts may set higher passing scores for their students and some students with disabilities who have individual education plans (IEPs) may have lower passing scores.

LEP students who have been in the United States one year or more take the math and reading BSTs in 8th grade for school accountability purposes. Scores do not have to count for graduation purposes until an LEP student has been in the United States 3 years. LEP students who do participate in BSTs may take the test with accommodations or translations and interpretations. In Minnesota's accountability system, an accommodation is defined as a change to the test format or test setting that does not change the standard being tested, such as administering the test in a small or individual setting. In addition to accommodations, translations or oral interpretations are available to LEP students taking the math test. A student passing a translated math test would receive a different notation on his or her transcript. Accommodations and translations allowed for LEP students during the 1999 testing cycle are listed in Appendix A.

Method

The Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning (CFL) collected the data compiled for this report through the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS). The researchers at Minnesota Assessment Project ran descriptive statistical analyses using the SPSS Information Analysis System. The development of this system has been a great help to accountability system in the state because it allows researchers and educators to better account for all students. In the past, students could not be accounted for in the state system because of missing or inaccurate ID numbers. In 1999, less than 200 of the nearly 200,000 students tested have yet to be identified in the system.

When interpreting the data and charts presented in this report, there are several important considerations to keep in mind:

Use of the term LEP. Fields in the MARSS database allow for an examination of only those students who are designated as receiving ESL or Bilingual services as reported to the Department of CFL. In this report, when the term "LEP" is used, it should be understood to mean those students who are designated limited English proficient and who receive ESL or bilingual services.

Date of enrollment. In order to be consistent with participation rates calculated in previous years, the enrollment numbers used are from enrollment numbers reported to the CFL as of

October 1, 1998. Thus some of the participation rates may differ from reports using enrollment data from the day of testing. The difference in the enrollment numbers from fall to the day of testing was small for 1999 (see Table 1). However, due to the high mobility of LEP students in general, the specific individuals enrolled may be very different at the beginning of the school year than at the time of the test.

Additional testing opportunities. The data in this report reflect only the results from BSTs given during the 1996 to 1999 school years. Students who do not pass a test have additional opportunities to retake the test in the summer or at other points during the school year. These retake results are not reported in this analysis.

Table 1. Change in Enrollment Numbers from October to Day of Test

Enrollment	October 1, 1998	Day of Test February 1999
All 8th grade students	67,966	67,933
LEP 8th grade students	2,034	2,050

Results

In an effort to gain a fuller picture of the participation of LEP students in the BSTs, we have chosen to examine in depth the performance of eighth graders in 1999, to look at the performance of eighth graders across the years that the test has been given (1996-1999), and to look at the performance of students across the grades 8-11 for the 1999 testing cycle. The results of our analyses are divided into the following sections: (1) participation of 8th graders from 1996-1999, (2) performance of 8th graders from 1996-1999, (3) mean BST performance in 1999, (4) performance of 8-11th graders on 1999 BST, (5) accommodation use and performance by 8th graders in 1999, and (6) types of accommodations used by 8th graders in 1999.

Participation. The participation rates for eighth graders taking the Basic Standards reading and math tests from 1996 to 1999 are shown in Table 2. When looking at these participation rates it is important to consider several factors that play a role in the interpretation of the data. When the BSTs were first offered in 1996, they were optional and only about 80% of all eligible students in the state took part in the testing. In 1997, school districts could choose to administer the BSTs or another set of standardized of tests instead of the BSTs. It was only in 1998 that all school districts across the state were required to administer BSTs for accountability purposes. In this respect, it is only the last two years of testing that can be compared on the same basis, although the data are presented for all of the years in which the BST has been administered so far.

By looking at the data presented in Table 2 and graphed in Figure 1, it is possible to compare the participation rates of LEP students to that of all students over time. In this analysis, "All students" includes all students taking the test, including LEP students and students with disabilities. Overall, the participation rates show general increases from 1996 to 1999, although there is some variation in certain years.

Performance. When looking at the performance data presented in Table 3, it should be noted that the passing rates for 1997 to 1999 are figured on the number of students achieving a score of at least 75% correct on the reading or math test. For eighth graders in 1996 (those graduating in 2000), the passing rate was only 70%. After 1996, the passing rate was raised for all students graduating after the year 2000. This difference in what constitutes a passing score may account

Table 2. Participation of 8th Grade Students in the Basic Standards Tests

	LEP Students				All Students			
	1996	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**
Enrolled Oct. 1st	997	753	1,784	2,034	65,647	65,934	66,526	67,966
Number Tested in Math	693	876	1,580	1,890	53,606	51,929	64,396	65,362
Percent Tested in Math	70%	>100%	89%	93%	82%	79%	97%	96%
Number Tested in Reading	657	852	1,574	1,887	51,780	50,386	64,401	65,405
Percent Tested in Reading	66%	>100%	88%	93%	79%	76%	97%	96%

Figure 1. Participation Rates for the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests 1996-99

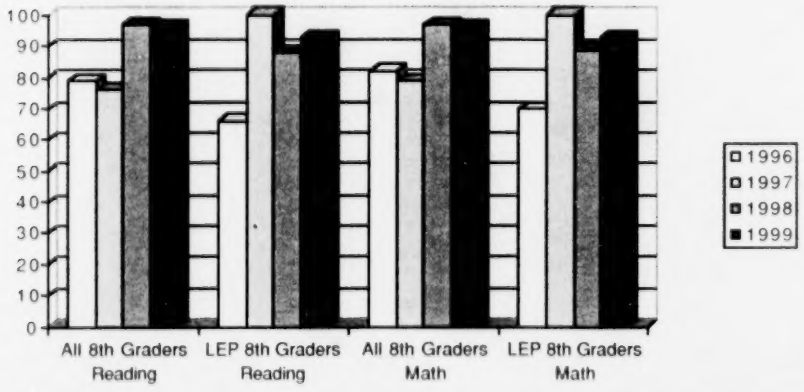


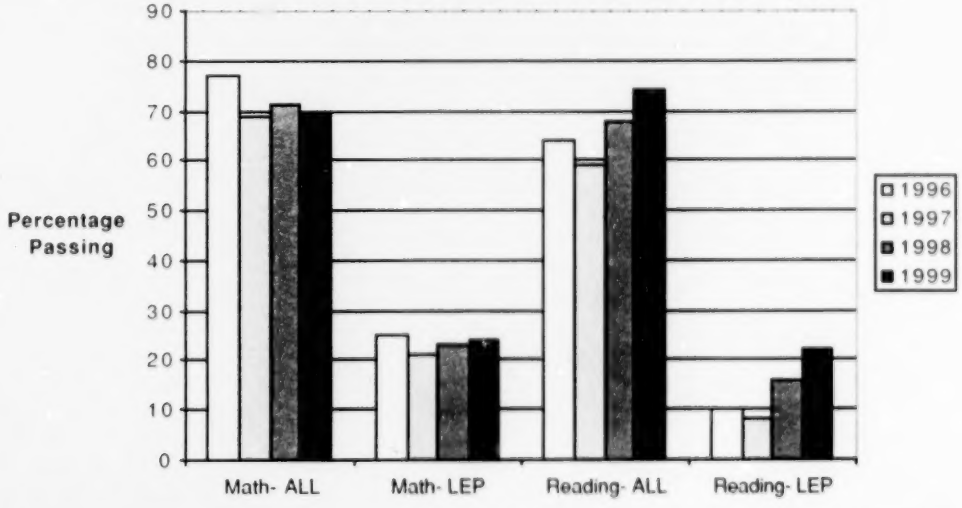
Table 3. Performance of 8th Graders 1996-99

		LEP Students				All Students			
		1996	1997	1998	1999	1996	1997	1998	1999
Math	# Tested	693	876	1,580	1,890	53,606	51,929	64,396	65,362
	# Passing	172	184	362	457	41,462	36,092	45,489	45,911
	% Passing	25%	21%	23%	24%	77%	69%	71%	70%
Reading	# Tested	657	852	1,574	1,887	51,780	50,386	64,401	65,405
	# Passing	66	72	252	407	33,121	29,760	43,811	48,180
	% Passing	10%	8%	16%	22%	64%	59%	68%	74%

for the drop in the passing rates of eighth grade students for both the math and the reading test between 1996 and 1997.

Since 1997, the math test scores for all students have stayed about the same, with around 70% of the students passing the math test on the first try. The percentage of LEP students passing has not changed much either, increasing slightly from 21 percent in 1997 to 24 percent in 1999 (also see Figure 2). It should be noted, however, that the number of LEP students taking the test in eighth grade has increased dramatically over this time, from 876 students tested in math in 1997 to 1,890 students in 1999.

Figure 2. Percentage of 8th Graders Passing BSTs 1996-99



Like the percentage passing math, the percentage passing for the reading test dropped a little between 1996 and 1997. Since 1997, however, the percentage of all students passing the reading test has increased steadily from 59% to 74%. These gains have mirrored the gains of LEP students on the reading test. The passing rate for LEP eighth graders has risen from 8% in 1997 to 22% in 1999.

The percentage of LEP students passing is considerably lower on both the reading and the math tests compared to the percentage of all students who pass. The percentage of LEP students passing the math test has stayed fairly stable at around 25%. However, the percentage of LEP students passing the reading test is growing steadily. In 1999 for the first time, nearly the same percentage (22%-24%) of LEP 8th graders passed the reading test and the math test on their first attempt.

It is useful to look not only at the percent of students passing, but also at student scores in order to determine whether students are improving over time even if they are not passing the tests. Table 4 and Figure 3 show the mean percentages of items correct on the math BST over the four year period 1996-99. The analyses do not include the roughly 100 students with invalid test scores. The mean percentages correct for both LEP students and all students have remained relatively constant over the four years the test has been given (around 80% for all students and 57% for LEP students). The mean percentage of items correct for LEP students is consistently about 23% lower than that for all students on the math test.

Table 4. 1996-99 Mean BST Math Performance of 8th Graders

	LEP 8th Graders				All 8th Graders			
	1996	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**
Number Tested	693	876	1,580	1,890	53,606	51,929	64,396	65,362
Mean Percent Correct	57%	58%	56%	57%	79%	80%	79%	79%

Figure 3. Mean Percentage of Math Items Correct

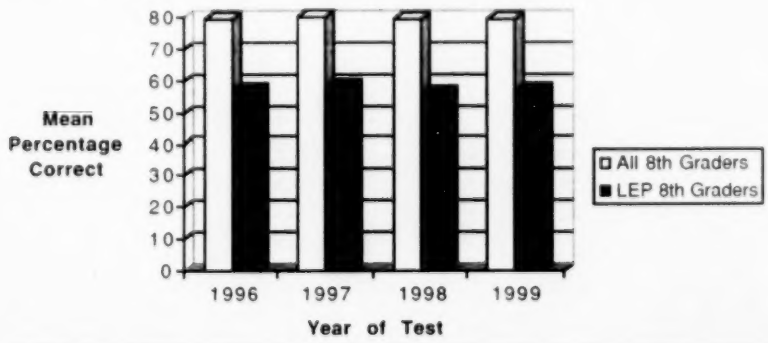
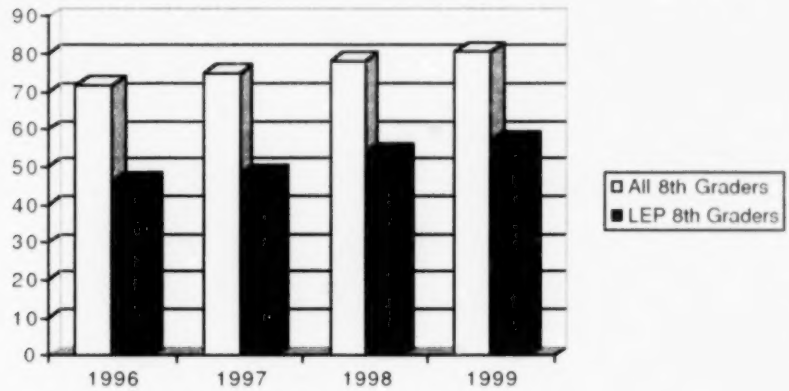


Table 5 and Figure 4 show similar data on the Basic Standards reading test. The mean percentage of items correct has increased slightly for all students in eighth grade over the four year period from 72% in 1996 to 81% in 1999. During the same period, the mean percentage of items correct on the reading test for LEP students increased from 46% in 1996 to 57% in 1999. Although LEP students typically start out with lower scores on the reading test, they are making larger amounts of gain than on the math test.

Table 5. 1996-99 Mean BST Reading Performance of 8th Graders

	LEP 8th graders				All 8th graders			
	1996	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**
Number Tested	657	852	1,574	1,887	51,780	50,386	64,401	65,405,
Mean Percent Correct	46%	48%	54%	57%	72%	75%	78%	81%

Figure 4. Mean Percentage of Reading Items Correct



Performance in grades 8 -11 on 1999 BSTs. Students who do not pass one or both of the BSTs have additional opportunities each year to take the tests, which they are required to pass in order to graduate from high school. In addition, new students moving into the state also need to pass the BSTs in order to be eligible to graduate from high school in Minnesota. For mainly these reasons, students beyond eighth grade also take the BSTs. Table 6 shows the results of all students and LEP students in grades 8-11 taking the BSTs in February 1999. It is important to keep in mind that the passing score for 11th graders (the class of 2000) is 70% and for other students in the table it is 75%. It is not clear from the data how many students represented in 9th through 11th grade are first time test takers and how many are taking the test for a 2nd, 3rd or 4th time because of not passing one or both portions previously.

Table 6. Performance of 8-11th Graders on 1999 BST

	LEP Students in 1999				All Students in 1999			
	8th	9th	10th	11th	8th	9th	10th	11th
Number Tested Math	1,890	1,367	1,056	602	65,362	18,511	11,422	5,669
Number Passed Math	457	249	241	131	45,911	6,056	3,552	2,184
Percent Passed Math	24%	18%	23%	22%	70%	33%	30%	39%
Number Tested Reading	1,887	1,527	1,174	714	65,405	19,727	11,833	5,808
Number Passed Reading	407	344	279	233	49,180	9,637	5,699	2,960
Percent Passed Reading	22%	23%	24%	33%	75%	49%	48%	51%

For all students in grades 9 through 11, about 50% of the students in any grade passed the reading test compared to about 25% of LEP students. For the math test, about one third of the students in grades 9 to 11 passed. LEP students taking the math tests have passing rates lower than the rates for all students in the same grades, ranging from 18 to 24 percent. Overall, LEP students in all grades have lower passing rates than students in general.

Accommodations. The way in which data are collected on the use of accommodations during the BSTs has changed over time. In 1999, data on what particular accommodations were used by each student were collected on a form that accompanied the test form. Table 7 summarizes the use of accommodations in relation to performance by LEP students in 8th grade in 1999. It is important to note that in these data, accommodations and translations of the test are not differentiated, so "accommodated" means that the student was provided an accommodation, a translation, or both. The data in Table 7 include all LEP students who were reported to have received at least one accommodation or translation. Some of these students may have also been students with disabilities and the accommodation received could have been an accommodation based on their LEP status, their disability status, or both. Whatever the case, very few LEP students were reported to have received accommodations or translations in this testing cycle.

Of the 8th grade LEP students taking the tests, only 2.7% used an accommodation on the reading

Table 7. Accommodation Use and Performance for LEP 8th Grade Students

Grade 8 LEP Students	Reading Test		Math Test	
	Accommodated	Not Accommodated	Accommodated	Not Accommodated
Number of students taking the test	51	1836	39	1851
Percent of students taking the test	2.7%	97.3%	2.1%	97.9%
Number of students passing the test	4	403	3	454
Percent passing the test	7.8%	21.9%	7.7%	24.5%
Number of students not passing the test	47	1433	36	1397
Percent not passing the test	92.2%	78.1%	92.3%	75.5%

test and only 2.1% used an accommodation on the math test. Over 97% of LEP students participating in each test took the test with no accommodation.

In terms of performance, just less than 8% of the accommodated LEP students on the reading and math tests achieved a passing level. Of the unaccommodated LEP students, 21.9% passed the reading test and 24.5% passed the math test. While the passing rate is lower for the accommodated students, this should not be taken to mean that the accommodations decrease student performance on the test. Students receiving accommodations are usually students with lower proficiency levels in English, and thus have more difficulty passing the tests (Albus, Liu, Thurlow, & Bielinski, 2000; Anderson, Liu, Swierzbin, Thurlow, & Bielinski, 2000). Taking into consideration the low numbers of students taking a test with accommodations it is possible that some of the students in the unaccommodated group would have benefited from receiving accommodations, or did receive accommodations that were not reported.

These data are in contrast to the accommodation usage data from 1997 when 12% of LEP students were reported to use some form of accommodation. Of LEP students using accommodations in 1997, 83% passed the math test and 2% passed the reading test (Liu & Thurlow, 1999). Even though the numbers of LEP eighth graders taking the BSTs more than doubled between 1997 and 1999, the number of LEP students who were reported as using accommodations on the tests fell by more than 50% for each. These numbers indicate that either accommodation use by LEP students in Minnesota is drastically declining or that it is not being reported accurately.

Types of accommodations used. Test administrators also reported the specific accommodations students used when taking the BSTs. The data were complied by CFL and merged with the

MARSS file on test participation. The accommodations used by LEP students are reported in Table 8. These data reflect the number of LEP students who were reported to use each type of accommodation and who also had a valid test score in the MARSS database.

Although we have questions about the validity of the accommodations, the accommodation data for LEP students who had valid scores for each test are reported in Table 8. Some of the students may have received multiple accommodations and are counted in more than one category in the table.

Like the data presented in Table 7, the numbers of students reported as having received accommodations is very low. Of the more than 1,800 eighth grade LEP students who took each test, the number of students reported as receiving the most popular accommodation was 23. The most frequently used accommodations for the reading test were short segment test booklets, extended time, and special setting accommodations. The most used accommodations for the math test were short segment test booklets, individual or small group administration of the test, extended time, and special setting accommodations. Although permitted, translations of tests were rarely offered for the math test, and no LEP students were reported as having received clarification or a translation of the test directions. More LEP students were reported as having received a large print version of the test, an accommodation specific to students with disabilities, than a translation of the math test.

Table 8. Accommodations Used by LEP 8th Grade Students in 1999

Accommodation	Number Tested Reading	Percent Tested Reading	Number Tested Math	Percent Tested Math
Short Segment Test Booklet	23	1.2	21	1.1
Extended Time	22	1.2	12	0.6
Special Setting	21	1.1	12	0.6
Individual or Small Group Administration	16	0.8	13	0.7
Oral Administration of Math Test in English	15*	0.8*	11	0.6
Translation of Directions	8	0.4	7	0.4
Large Print Test**	6	0.3	7	0.4
Translation of Test	5*	0.3*	2	0.1
Clarification or Translation of Directions	0	0.0	0	0.0
Writing Directly in the Test Booklet.	0	0.0	0	0.0

* This accommodation is *not* offered for the reading test.
** This accommodation is for students with disabilities.

Implications

Based on four years of Basic Standards Test data for LEP students, we have observed the following:

- Participation for LEP students in the Minnesota BSTs remains high.
- Performance for LEP students remains low. There is an achievement gap of approximately 20%-25% between mean scores for LEP students and mean scores for their native-English speaking peers on both the reading and the math tests. This gap does appear to be narrowing a bit, but the gap is not unexpected given the fact that these students are in the process of learning the academic English needed to take the tests.
- Greater gains in mean percentages of items correct are being made by LEP students taking the reading tests than the math tests. This suggests that ESL teachers may be successful in teaching reading skills needed on the BST. More detailed examination of the types of remediation programs provided for students who do not pass the math test may give clues as to why the gains are smaller for the math BST.

Based on the very limited data in this report pertaining to students using accommodations and students retaking the BSTs in grades 9-11, several observations can be made.

If approximately 25% of the LEP students who retake the reading or math test each year in grades 9-11 pass it, there will be LEP students who do not pass the tests by 12th grade and therefore do not receive a high school diploma. Future BST analyses need to include those LEP students taking the tests in summer remediation programs to gain an accurate picture of how many LEP students are not receiving diplomas because they are not able to pass the tests.

Data on which accommodations are being used for the reading versus the math test are not yet accurate enough to use to draw conclusions. Although the specific accommodation data did allow for recording whether the accommodation was used for the reading or the math test, all of the students in the file were listed as using the same accommodations for both tests. This fact makes the data somewhat suspect considering that some accommodations (e.g., oral administration of the test in English and translation) are not allowed for the reading test. Most likely these accommodations were not used for the reading test but are a result of not differentiating between the reading and math tests on the accommodations form. In fact, some students who were not listed as having been tested for a particular test in the MARSS database were reported as having received an accommodation for the test. Clearly, if a student does not take a test, that student did not receive an accommodation.

At the present time, data on accommodations use are only collected for 8th graders. Test administrators are asked to fill out a separate sheet for the reading and math tests telling what accommodations an individual student uses. Anecdotal information from the test administrators suggests that the extra time and effort required to fill in the separate sheets for large numbers of LEP students is a burden. It appears that instead of two, only one sheet is filled out with information about reading and math accommodations combined. There may be a way to collect accommodations data so that it is less of a burden on test administrators and so that it is easier to analyze. In Missouri, for example, accommodations information is collected on the test answer sheet so that separate forms are not needed. If students using accommodations were tested in small groups, it would be easier for test administrators in this type of setting to accurately record accommodations information. Better accommodations data would help researchers and policymakers determine which accommodations are being used, and whether particular accommodations are having more benefit for LEP students than others.

Finally, the numbers of LEP students using accommodations seems low. Although accommodation usage varies among states with statewide accountability systems, the numbers tend to be higher than found in the Minnesota data. In a recent testing cycle in Missouri, about 10% of LEP students use accommodations on statewide tests (J. Bielinski, personal communication, June 20, 2000). Reports of accommodation use by students with disabilities in Rhode Island, another group for whom accommodations are allowed, have shown up to 53% of these students using accommodations on statewide math tests (Elliott, Bielinski, Thurlow, DeVito, & Hedlund, 1999). If the numbers of students using an accommodation on the BSTs are fairly accurate, more research is needed into why the numbers of accommodated LEP students are so low in comparison with states like Missouri that have a smaller LEP student population and lower than other groups of students who are allowed accommodations such as students with disabilities. Do educators and school staff who make testing decisions need more training regarding the purpose of accommodations and the benefit to LEP students? Are ESL and bilingual teachers included in making accommodations decisions for LEP students? Are there more useful accommodations than the ones currently offered? Do the students and their families not want to use accommodations? Is the school worried about the legal ramifications of offering a translation to one language group, but not offering it to another because of the financial cost and the availability of translators? Answering these questions would help to make the testing situation more equitable for LEP students.

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Appendix A

Accommodations and Translations Available to LEP Students on the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests of Math and Reading 1999

Accommodations and Translations Available to LEP Students on the Minnesota Basic Standards Tests of Math and Reading 1999

Accommodations	**Test**
Audiocassettes in English	Math
A script of the audiocassette in English	Math
Clarification or translation of directions	Math, Reading
Extended time	Math, Reading
Individual or small group setting	Math, Reading
Short segment test booklet	Math, Reading
Translations	**Test**
Translations	Math
Oral interpretations	Math

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